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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 001232

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: A/S SHANNON MEETS WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SANTOS ON
JANUARY 30

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos told WHA A/S Thomas Shannon and INL A/S Anne Patterson the U.S. and Colombia should develop a coordinated message on Plan Colombia's successes, a message he would take with him to Washington when he met with Secretary of Defense Gates. Santos urged the U.S. and UN to develop a common approach to measure hectares under coca cultivation, saying the Colombian and international publics were confused by different methodologies that produced sharply varying results. Santos said three key programs -- spraying, development aid, and military assistance -- should be integrated more closely in planning and executing programs and operations. On nationalization, all agreed it would be helpful for the GOC to show it was already preparing to assume key costs. Santos welcomed news of approval for a fourth spray package. End summary.

¶2. (U) On January 30, WHA A/S Shannon and INL A/S Patterson met with Defense Minister Santos. Shannon and Patterson were accompanied by Ambassador William B. Wood, Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mary Lee Warren, USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator Mark Silverman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Steve Johnson, ONDCP Deputy Director James O'Gara, INL Office Director for the Americas Tony Arias, WHA/AND Director Phil French, Political Counselor John Creamer, Defense Attache Rey Velez, and pol/mil officer (notetaker). Santos was accompanied by Vice Ministers of Defense Juan Carlos Pinzon and Sergio Jaramillo, Military Forces Commander General Freddy Padilla, Ambassador to the U.S. Carolina Barco, Colombian DCM Mariana Pacheco, and U.S. Office Director Patricia Cortes.

Communicating Plan Colombia Achievements

¶3. (C) Santos opened the meeting by saying the U.S. and Colombia faced a common challenge in highlighting Plan Colombia's successes. He stressed the need for a coordinated message, which he would use in upcoming meetings with Congressional staffers. Plan Colombia was beyond the halfway

point to success; it was key that the U.S. continue to provide the assistance needed to finish the job. Plan Colombia's fundamental goal was to strengthen Colombian democracy; the recent revelations of paramilitary-political ties from the Justice and Peace process proved that it was working. A/S Patterson was pleased with a pocket-sized booklet and laminated charts noting achievements of the GOC's Democratic Security program and suggested the GOC share them with Congress. Despite a difficult climate in Congress, Shannon said Colombia had a good story to tell, with substantial progress made in a short time.

Common Measures for a Clearer Message

¶4. (C) Santos said different drug cultivation measurements by the U.S. and UN caused confusion, especially since changes to the U.S. methodology had resulted in upward revisions of the estimated hectares of coca cultivation. To the public, an "overnight" change in the number of coca hectares from 80,000 to 144,000 looked like failure. What was needed was a common basis which could be calculated retroactively to provide a clear comparison. Ambassador Wood agreed with Santos' frustration, saying the U.S. and Colombia were winning the war but lacked the numbers to show it. Wood explained the former U.S. measure was inadequate and required improvement; hence the changes in last year's approach. The best way forward was to freeze the method now to allow comparability in the future. Santos argued that what was needed was a simple and clear metric -- a harmonized number that could be used to establish a baseline against which to measure progress.

Coordination of Spraying, Military, and Development

¶5. (C) Santos said three different program areas -- spraying, development aid, and military campaigns -- were planned separately, leading to failure to consolidate initial successes. Under the current approach, the FARC returned to areas after military operations subsided, and coca was resown where fumigation ended. By aligning these three approaches, affected areas could be recovered permanently. Wood agreed coordination was vital. The difficulty, he said, was that spray and development projects could not shift locations from one day to the next. For example, in 2005 we shifted spray operations to Narino at the GOC's request and lost the opportunity to spray 30,000 hectares. Moreover, alternative development programs targeted places most likely to succeed. Still, he said we wanted to support military efforts to hold terrain, and were looking at supporting small projects in Putumayo.

Helicopter Dilemma (Counterdrug / Counterguerrilla)

¶6. (C) Pinzon said Putumayo showed the need for coordination, particularly with respect to helicopters. Spraying in Putumayo had been effective; no coca remained there. The COLMIL had sent in a counterdrug battalion to control territory, create an environment conducive to development, and ensure coca would not be replanted. Still, without helicopters, the battalion lacked the mobility to carry out its mission and establish permanent control. The U.S. had sufficient helicopter assets; the question was to which mission they would be applied. The Ambassador said we also believed flexibility was important, and we had approved 41 of 44 GOC requests to make spray helicopters available for military operations. Still, the fundamental problem was the shortage of helicopters. Using helicopters for military missions translated into fewer hectares sprayed. A/S Patterson said we would soon provide equipment for a fourth spray package, which would increase spray capacity. The Colombians were enthusiastic over this news.

Wealth Tax Allocation

¶7. (C) Pinzon noted that allocation of the new 'wealth tax' for military spending was nearly finalized; a detailed budget matrix would be shared soon. Wood noted a tendency to spend new tax income on "things" and cautioned that those would not serve their purpose if they were not sustained. Expenses such as training, airstrip upgrades, logistics systems, and personnel management must not be overlooked. The U.S. was ready to help. Santos affirmed that the COLMIL's intent was to "buy the minimum." Colombian purchases would not be guided by actions in Venezuela or Ecuador. Still, certain materiel required repair and refurbishment, such as the Navy's four frigates which played an important role in interdiction. The MoD urged candidly, "I ask for your help in evaluating what we really need from my military's wish-list." For the first time, he stressed, every COLMIL capital investment included a study of maintenance costs.

Planning for 'Nationalization'

¶8. (C) A/S Patterson said the lack of pilots and mechanics, as well as budgets for sustainment, was a major obstacle to nationalizing our aviation assistance programs. Pinzon said the COLMIL would begin on February 9 a planning exercise with the Embassy. The exercise would review budgets for the next two to three years and would prioritize expenditures with a view to sustainment, maintenance, and logistical capacity. Patterson noted that she and Pinzon would meet on February 5 in Washington to discuss nationalization programs. Shannon added that it would be important to show that Colombia was preparing now for nationalization.

Pending Visit to Washington

¶9. (C) Both sides looked forward to talks between Santos and U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates on February 1. Santos commented on the "positive chemistry" he felt with new SouthCom Commander Admiral Stavridis. He said the strategic framework agreement almost ready, and the COLMIL's 25-point strategy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security policy was evolving well. On High Value Targets (HVTs), Santos said these were a means to an end not an end in themselves. Both sides agreed that future planning documents should detail specific programs. Ambassador Wood said the GOC's new "Strengthening Democracy and Social Development" plan should outline specific programs for which the GOC was seeking funding. This would facilitate European support.

¶10. (U) A/S Shannon and A/S Patterson did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before their departure.

DRUCKER